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General Assembly

Seventy-first session

Official Records

7th plenary meeting
Monday, 19 September 2016, 7.30 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Thomson ..... (Fiji)

The meeting was called to order at 7.40 p.m.

High-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants

Agenda items 13 and 117 *(continued)*

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Co-Chair Thomson: As we begin the closing events of the high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, it is my pleasure to present the global première of a special version of John Lennon's iconic song, entitled "Imagine". A collaboration among UNICEF, Ms. Yoko Ono and French music producer David Guetta, the video brings together thousands of voices from around the world to shine a spotlight on issues facing the most vulnerable people.

We will now see the video.

A video presentation was broadcast in the General Assembly Hall.

Co-Chair Thomson: It is now my honour to give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson, who will deliver closing remarks that will include a summary of the plenary debate and the six interactive multi-stakeholder round tables.

The Deputy Secretary-General: Today has been a historic day. I do not even have to imagine this. It is a reality, and I think that that wonderful song in this setting proves the power of music and culture. Maybe we should do more of that in the United Nations.

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I congratulate Member States on having adopted by consensus the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1, annex). This shows that despite differing perspectives, we can unite around common principles and around core commitments to refugees and migrants. Large movements of refugees and migrants present some of the most challenging issues of our time. Individually, many Member States today have demonstrated positive approaches to refugees and migrants. They have saved the lives of migrants at sea. They have treated migrants humanely. They have extended protection to refugees. Yes, all this is to be commended.

However, we know that no one State can deal with these transnational issues by acting alone. We must work together, more than ever before. The situation today requires urgent attention and urgent action. Today, we have heard moving accounts that brought to this beautiful Hall the stark reality of being a refugee or a migrant — suffering in times of war, the unimaginable sexual violence and exploitation and the experience of alienation and discrimination in a new land. But they also told us about the rebuilding of their lives, about their skills and capacities finally being used and about how the global community needs to act.

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In both the plenary meetings and the round tables today, representatives have emphasized the centrality of human rights for migrants and refugees and reaffirmed their international obligations. They have committed to tackling the discrimination and gender-based violence that women and girls face everywhere. Many have highlighted the negative consequence of irregular migration. They have called for greater cooperation to address the despicable human trafficking and smuggling of migrants and refugees. States have also recognized the strain on countries that host large numbers of refugees. They have agreed to implement a comprehensive response to large refugee movements, not least in protracted crisis situations.

Today, several representatives have also shared plans to expand financial assistance, taking into account both the humanitarian and the development aspects. New financial mechanisms have been announced to increase support to host countries and host communities. We have heard concrete examples of the private sector creating jobs for refugees, and how Member States have supported such efforts. It has been encouraging to hear that additional countries have joined in the efforts to provide resettlement space or alternative pathways for the admission of refugees.

We must also rally behind the call in the Declaration to ensure that all migrant and refugee girls and boys have access to education within a few months of their arrival. It was widely recognized that we must increase financial support for the education of refugee children and youth.

Development programmes are also crucial and a key priority. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized the contribution that migration makes to economic and social progress. We must harness that positive energy. To do so requires improved data on migration patterns and impacts, as many speakers have emphasized.

We also require a clear-headed and informed policy debate, one that avoids stigmatizing refugees or migrants. The Secretary-General's launch this morning of a global campaign to combat xenophobia, entitled "Together — Respect, Safety and Dignity for All", is receiving broad support and affirmation. We look forward to working with Member States and partners on that project.

Today, many Member States have declared their intention to incorporate refugees and migrants in national development planning. That will foster more coherent planning and break down the silos that isolate humanitarian assistance from development work, which is such a crucial task for all of us. At the same time, we must ensure that commitments for official development assistance are being met. Creating jobs and investing in youth are critical for making migration a choice, not a necessity.

With regard to attaining peace and security, it is with great hope and anticipation that we have heard in this Hall a strong call for prevention and resolution of armed conflicts. Violent conflicts are often the source of mass displacement, as we all know. Acting early and with foresight and responsibility must be a guiding principle for our work. The shocking images we see and the human stories we hear touch all of us around the world. Therefore, we must look not only to Governments, but also to others for action. Civil society and the private sector have shown engagement and taken innovative approaches when faced with refugee and migrant movements.

We acknowledge the many steps and tasks on the road ahead, such as agreeing on how to govern migration effectively, learning how to successfully integrate refugees and migrants into our societies, and how to increase cooperation to assist migrants in vulnerable situations. Given the urgency of all these challenges, the implementation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1, annex) must begin now, at home and internationally.

Member States have set critical deadlines. By 2018, we aim to have adopted a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration — a formula that, by the way, is also taken from the Sustainable Development Goals. We also want to achieve a more equitable sharing of the responsibility for hosting and supporting the world's refugees by adopting a global compact on refugees in 2018.

The United Nations system will now mobilize for a comprehensive follow-up process. We have taken an important step today by bringing the International Organization for Migration into the United Nations system as a related organization. In so doing, we recognize its unique and valuable contribution to the work of the United Nations on migration. That makes the United Nations system stronger as we rise to meet our new challenges and to seize opportunities. The New York Declaration calls for ongoing follow-up of

our commitments. It would be helpful to take stock a year from now to ensure that we are on track for meeting our objectives by 2018. As one of our young refugee speakers reminded us this morning, refugees are already taking action; now is the time for the international community to act.

In closing, let me say that it will take determined and collective efforts to address large movements of refugees and migrants in the world. We need to prevent and speedily resolve political crises. We need to respond to humanitarian crises. We need to engage in informed policy debate, as we have started to do today. We need to protect the human rights of all. We need to address root causes and ensure that no one is left behind. And we need to counter polarizing forces that aim to instil fear and divide us into "us" and "them".

Some of the refugees and migrants who joined us today suffered terrible ordeals. They have demonstrated courage, resilience and offered a measure of hope. We must respond by carrying out the New York Declaration in that same spirit. Together — and "together" is perhaps the most important word in the world today — we can shape a new future. This must be a future in which migrants and refugees, host nations and host communities can live together in harmony, well-being and mutual respect, and today Member States have started this work. Let us go to work together.

Co-Chair Thomson: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his statement.

I shall now make a few brief remarks before closing.

I join in thanking all Member States for their high level of participation in today's summit; it reflects the gravity of the situation before us and our collective commitment to finding humane global solutions to address this crisis. But our actions must not stop here.

We must move quickly to fulfil the commitments made today. We must continue to give the refugee and migrant crisis the attention, energy and support that it needs. We must redouble our efforts to protect the human rights of refugees and migrants. We must counter racism, xenophobia and others forms of intolerance that seek to dehumanize vulnerable people in need. Most importantly, we must push for the universal implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will help to address many of the root causes that drive people to flee.

I stand ready to work with Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and other key stakeholders throughout the General Assembly at its seventy-first session so that we may find durable solutions that meet this moral imperative of our time. As I said in my opening remarks this morning,

> "I urge Member States to maintain their high levels of ambition throughout these processes and to always reach for the higher ground on the basis of our common humanity and our values of decency and equality. The well-being of millions rests with us at the United Nations, and we must not fail them in their hour of need"(*A/71/PV.3, p. 2*).

I cannot close this evening without congratulating Member States and all those who made possible the adoption today of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1, annex). I see many of them in the Hall this evening, and I acknowledge their presence. On behalf of migrants and refugees everywhere, I thank everyone.

I now declare closed the high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants.

The meeting rose at 7.55 p.m.